

FIELD BUS DISTRIBUTION UNIT

The invention relates to a field bus distribution unit as defined in the preamble of claim 1.

In process automation technology, field devices are often used, which are connected with superordinated units via a field bus.

Field devices serve generally for registering and/or influencing process variables.

Examples of such field devices are fill level meters, mass flow meters, pressure and temperature measuring devices, pH-redox measuring devices, conductivity measuring devices, etc., which, as measuring devices, register the corresponding process variables fill level, flow, pressure, temperature, pH-value, and conductivity. A large number of such field devices are manufactured and sold by the firm Endress + Hauser[®].

The superordinated units serve for process visualization, process control, as well as for interacting with the field devices attached to the field bus.

Examples of field bus systems are Profibus[®], Foundation[®] Fieldbus, etc..

via the field bus, not only measured values but also a multiplicity of different kinds of information can be exchanged between the field device and a superordinated unit. Thus, for instance, device specific information can be stored in the field device and called-up as required. Such device-specific information can include location information, start-up information, service information, etc.. A storing of device-specific information in the field device is, however, only possible, once the field device has been installed on the field bus and is ready for operation. The input of this information can, on the one hand, be done at the device itself, with the help

of a display and keyboard, or, on the other hand, such can be done from a superordinated unit.

As a rule, device-specific information (location information and start-up information) arises at the installation of the field device of concern. In this case, a technician must cumbrously input this information via the keyboard at the field device or e.g. forward such to appropriate operating personnel, in the case of the superordinated unit (control room). As a rule, the devices are not yet operational at the installation, i.e. they first have to be initialized. This means, however, that the mentioned information can only be stored in the field device after a delay. Because of this delay, it becomes possible that erroneous information becomes stored in the field device.

Likewise problematic is the storing of service information, when the relevant field device is malfunctioning.

Furthermore, in the case of a device replacement, all information stored in the device is lost.

An object of the invention, therefore, is to provide a field bus distribution unit, which permits device-specific information to be reliably available during installation, and in the case of replacement, of field devices.

This object is achieved by the field bus distribution unit defined in claim 1.

Further developments of the invention are set forth in the dependent claims.

An essential idea of the invention is to provide in a field bus distribution unit a microcontroller, which serves for the transmission of device-specific device information.

In order to be able to register, in simple manner, device-specific information, the microcontroller is connected with a reader module for chip-tags. Such chip-tags are widely used and serve for simple and cost-favorable storage of information.

In a basic example, the chip-tags are RFID-tags.

These chip-tags can be provided e.g. on the connecting cables for the field devices. In this case, e.g. location information remains available, even in the case of replacement of a field device.

The device-specific information can involve location information, ordering codes, device history, etc..

In a further development of the invention, the microcontroller is connected with a GPS module. In this way, the field bus distribution unit can be quickly and reliably located, and not all field devices connected to the field bus distribution unit need their own GPS module. As a rule, the location information of the field bus distribution unit is sufficient, in order also to uniquely locate the field devices situated mostly in the immediate vicinity of the field bus distribution unit.

The invention will now be explained in greater detail on the basis of an example of an embodiment illustrated in the drawing, the figures of which show as follows:

Fig. 1 schematic illustration of a field bus system; and

Fig. 2 schematic illustration of a field bus distribution unit of the invention.

Fig. 1 shows a field bus system in greater detail. Attached to a data bus D1 are a plurality of computer units, workstations WS1, WS2. These computer units serve as process control systems. They are used for process visualization, process monitoring and

engineering, as well as for interacting with and monitoring individual field devices. Data bus D1 works e.g. according to the Profibus FMS standard, or according to the HSE (High Speed Ethernet) standard of Foundation® Fieldbus. Via a gateway G1, which is also referred to as a linking device or as a segment coupler, the data bus D1 is connected with a field bus segment SM1, which is composed, essentially, of a field bus distribution unit VE and a plurality of field devices F1, F2, F3 and F4. The field bus distribution unit VE is connected via a field bus FB with the gateway G1. The field devices are connected to the field bus distribution unit VE.

Via the field bus system, the field devices F1, F2, F3 and F4 can exchange data with the computer units WS1, WS2.

Fig. 2 shows the field bus distribution unit in more detail. The field bus distribution unit VE includes a conventional field bus distribution unit, which, beyond that, additionally includes a microcontroller μ C, a memory S, a GPS-module GPS and a reader module LM. The microcontroller μ C is connected with the field bus FB via a field bus interface FS. Additionally, the field bus distribution unit VE has four connectors A1, A2, A3, A4, which are connectable to the various field devices. Illustrated by way of example, is the connection to the field device F1 using a cable K1. Cable K1 has plugs, respectively S1, S1', at both ends. Plug S1 serves for connection with the connector A1. Plug S1' serves for connection with the field device.

The function of the invention will now be explained in greater detail. Present on the connecting cable K1 is a chip-tag CE, in which device-specific information is stored. This chip-tag CE can be provided directly on the connecting cable K1, or on the plug S1. The chip-tags CE are passive units without their own energy supplies. Serving for read-out of the information stored in the chip-tag CE is the reader module LM. It transmits also the energy needed for the read-out. A transmission of information between chip-tag CE and reader module LM is only

possible, when the chip-tag CE is located within range of the reader module LM. As a rule, the chip-tag CE is arranged on the front end of the connecting cable K1, as near as possible to the reader module LM. If device-specific information is needed in the superordinated units WS1 or WS2, as the case may be, then a corresponding query is directed to the field bus distribution unit VE. Thereupon, the reader module LM reads from the corresponding chip-tag CE and transmits the desired information.

In a further development of the invention, the microcontroller μ C is connected with a GPS module, which makes location-specific information available. As a rule, the field devices connected to a field bus distribution unit VE are provided on a special process component, so that the location information of the distributor unit is also sufficient for the location information of the connected field devices. In this way, current location information is available for all field devices F1 - F4, without such field devices themselves needing GPS modules.

Additionally, the field bus distributor unit is connected with a memory S, in which all device-specific information can be stored. A significant advantage of the invention is that location-specific information, as well as device-specific information, such as e.g. device history, are not lost upon a replacement of a field device, despite the replacement of the field device. Also, the storage of the device-specific information is possible in the case of a field device which is not yet ready for operation. The desired information is transmitted during installation of the field device into the corresponding chip-tag CE by a service technician using a writer module (not shown in more detail).

Additionally, the invention also contributes to an increased process safety, since information can be stored in the chip-tag CE for the attached field device. If an incorrect field device is attached to the cable K1, this can be easily be discovered by

comparison of the data stored in the chip-tag CE and that made available by the field device.

The invention enables, in simple and cost-favorable manner, both call-up and storage of device-specific data.